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How does a fire prevention plan benefit your workplace?

Industry Trends | By **SafetyCulture Team** | 2 Aug 2023 | 5 minute read

No matter what industry you're in, how big your team is, or how much you already know about fire safety, having a fire prevention plan is critical. Even the smallest flame can turn into a major disaster, causing loss of life and serious damage to your property – and it's not something you want to deal with when running a business.

So, let's dive into why having a rock-solid fire prevention plan in place at your workplace is so important. We've included some expert insights to help you be as proactive as possible with your fire-safety measures. We're here to make sure your workplace is well prepared.

Why are fire-safety procedures so important?

Fire-safety procedures in the workplace are absolutely vital – and for good reasons. It's not just about following the law; it's a business owner's moral obligation to keep everyone safe and sound, including employees and visitors. No matter the industry or location, fire hazards can pop up unexpectedly. That's why it's on the organization to make sure it has top-notch fire-safety measures in place.

Having a fire prevention plan is just one piece of the puzzle. But it really helps cut down the risks of fire-related accidents, while promoting a safer environment for all employees.

Real-life incidents: Learning from past tragedies

Unfortunately, we're too often given a reality check about the very real dangers of poor fire safety – from the recent New Zealand hostel fire in May, to the horrific London Grenfell Tower fire of 2017. Both resulted in lives lost, and serve as painful reminders of the devastating consequences fires can reap when adequate fire safety measures are not in place. Lives could have been saved with better fire prevention plans and safety protocols.

But the reality is that putting together this documentation isn't hard. In fact, there are solutions, like the SafetyCulture platform, that can streamline the job and keep your workplace safe with regular reminders and updates.

Here are four parts of a fire prevention plan that industry experts recommend you focus on – they could end up not only saving your company money, but more importantly, also saving lives.

Check it out: Browse our fire safety checklists

4 steps to a fire prevention plan

1. Identify fire hazards

The first step when planning your fire-prevention strategy is to identify the most obvious potential hazards both inside and immediately outside of the physical workplace. You'll want either a qualified professional or an experienced team member to do a thorough risk assessment that highlights areas susceptible to fire outbreaks or damage.

What are some of the most common fire hazards at work?

- Electrical faults
- Flammable materials
- Improper storage
- Heating systems
- Outdoor smoking areas

Frontline workers play a key role in identifying these fire hazards during their day-to-day tasks. Even something like a misplaced bin can cause eye-watering damage in the worst-case scenario. Encourage staff to report any concerns to help decision-makers better address these risks – and update the actual fire prevention plan.

"There's a case study I use when explaining why workplaces shouldn't leave their bulk waste bins up against the wall," says Luke Robinson, Risk Solutions Manager at SafetyCulture Care. "Someone flicked their cigarette into a bulk waste bin that was set against a wall, which caught fire and ended up melting all the plastics inside. Not only did it cause $1.5 million worth of damage to the building, but the whole workplace had to be evacuated. More importantly, toxic smoke from the melted plastic spread throughout the building. The bin was positioned directly underneath the air intake for the building's air conditioning system."

What could have been done differently? "Now, if someone had seen that issue and reported it, the bin could have been moved," Luke explains. "Would that have stopped the individual from throwing their cigarette into the bin? Not necessarily. But even if the materials did catch fire, the bin would have been well separated from the electricals on the wall and away from the air intake."

2. Provide fire safety training

Although some workers may roll their eyes at having to do a fire drill, there's a reason that organizations conduct them – on the rare chance that the fire is *real*, your team will know exactly how to respond. That's why its essential for everyone in the company – from the newest frontline worker, right up to the C-suite – must get regular fire safety training.

What should fire safety training include?

- Proper use of fire extinguishers,
- Correct evacuation procedure
- Emergency action plans
- General fire safety procedures in the workplace

"Small business owners might know that their fire extinguishers must be inspected every six months, but they might not understand the why."

– Craig Cruickshank, Health and Safety Environment Quality Advisor, SafetyDocs by SafetyCulture

By educating your people about fire safety, you empower your workforce to respond swiftly and decisively during a fire emergency. For larger and culturally diverse businesses especially, this training should be carried out in multiple languages. It should also cover when and how tools, like fire extinguishers, should be used. This, in particular, is where access to a comprehensive fire prevention plan can be extremely valuable for employees.

"If you were to survey small business owners, they might know that their fire extinguishers must be inspected every six months, but they might not understand the *why*," Luke says. "They may get an invoice for the safety check-up, or they might see that someone comes into the workplace to physically look over their fire-safety equipment, but it's unlikely they will know it's because the devices need to be adequately pressurized, stored in a safe and easy-to-access area, and be in good operating condition always ready for use."

"Regardless of the size of the organization, you need to understand the inherent risks in your building and how to best manage them – not only to keep yourself safe, but to protect your livelihood in the event of a fire," he says.

3. Create an emergency action plan

Having a comprehensive emergency action plan as part of your overall fire-prevention strategy is essential. This plan should outline specific roles and responsibilities for each team member in case of a fire emergency. And decision-makers need to ensure that all employees are familiar with the evacuation routes, assembly points, where fire extinguishers are placed, and any other necessary safety steps outlined in the plan.

Regular fire drills and training exercises should be used to reinforce the emergency action plan and identify any areas for improvement. Frontline workers, in particular, should be active participants in this training to build confidence in case they have to deal with a real-life fire situation.

"Where these plans do sometimes fall down is in the upkeep of the documentation," says Craig Cruickshank, Health and Safety Environment Quality Advisor at SafetyDocs by SafetyCulture. "Emergency action plans and fire prevention plans more broadly must be regularly maintained. When they don't change with the business, they become outdated. Someone might leave the company and suddenly there are no more regular fire drills. Or maybe the person handling the induction of new staff gets promoted and the new team member doesn't spend enough time on fire safety."

4. Leverage the right technology

One very useful addition to any fire-prevention strategy, especially for frontline workers, is using the right technology to help minimize risk. Even something as simple as an app on your employees' phones can save lives. That's why SafetyCulture is so committed to constantly innovating our platform and ensuring workers across all industries can work more safely, despite the ever-present risk of fire.

"From incident-reporting facilities to auditing procedures, and maintenance checklists to hazard settings and reporting tools – SafetyCulture can help your workplace streamline fire safety and reduce the burden on safety officers."

Fire safety procedures in the workplace are not optional – they're an absolute necessity to protect both lives and property. From frontline workers to key decision-makers, everyone has a role to play in creating a safe working environment. The good news is that having a robust plan in place can help your workplace significantly reduce the risk of fire-related accidents. And solutions like SafetyCulture will make the process that much easier.

Interested in learning more about fire safety? We suggest…

- How to prevent business insurance claims and protect your people
- What you need to know about fire safety plan
- How to conduct a fire drill

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